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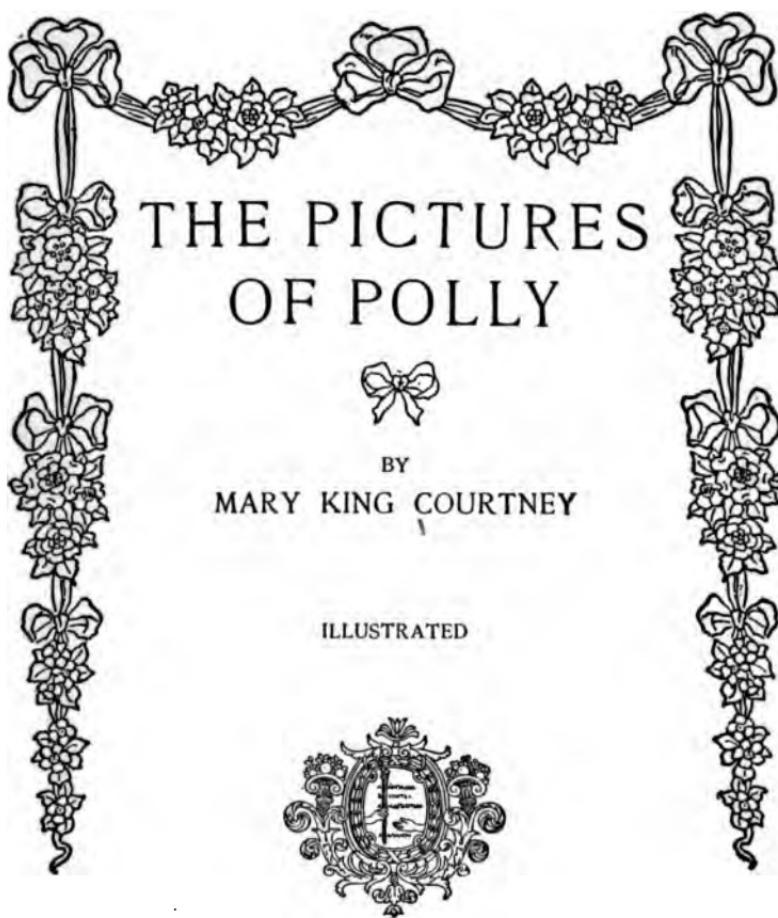
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PORTRAIT OF POLLY



THE PICTURES OF POLLY



BY

MARY KING COURTNEY

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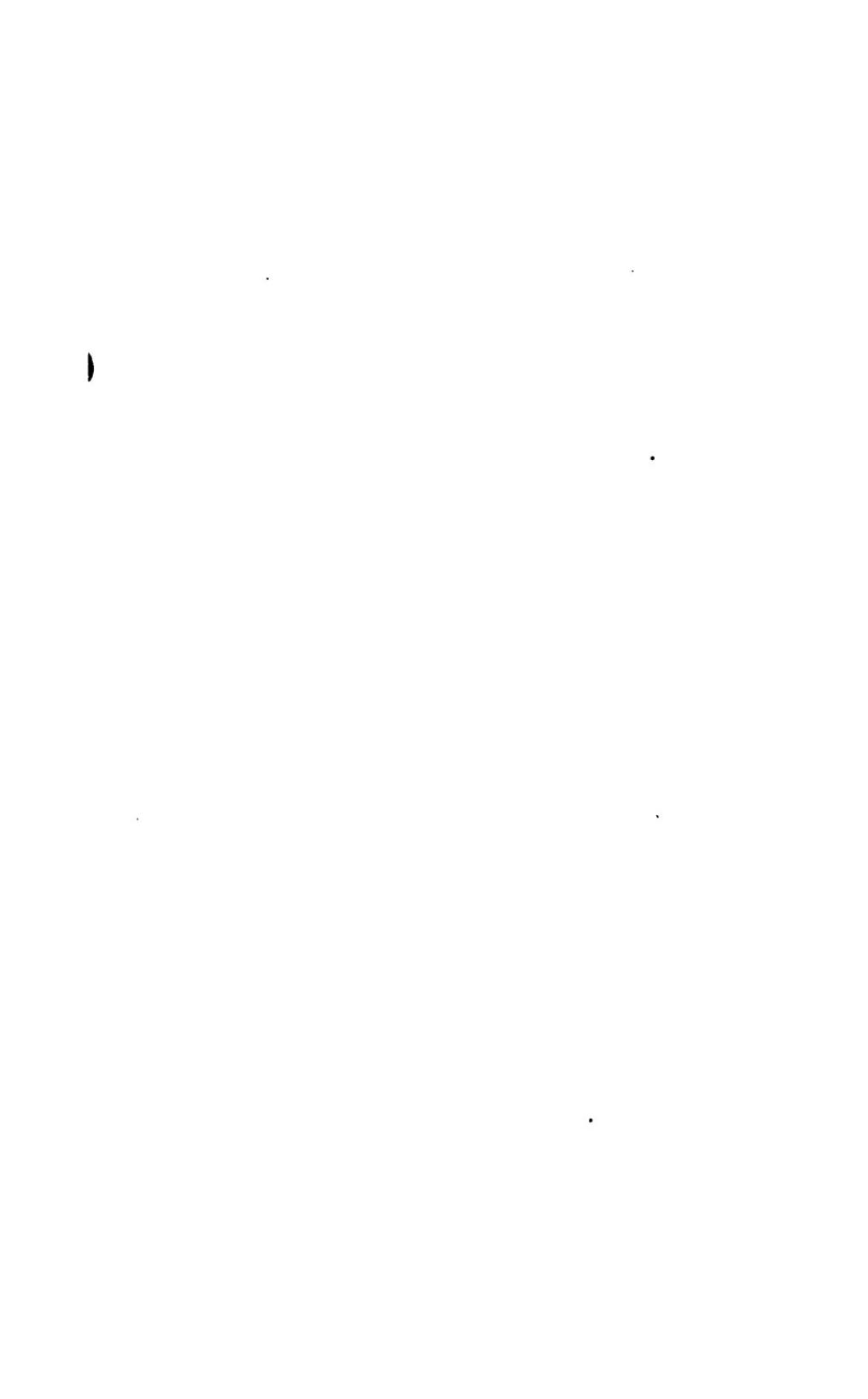
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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
PUBLISHED OCTOBER, 1912

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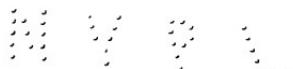
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CHAPTER I



HEN Mrs. Wyatt learned that she must go at once to join her husband in India, and stay a year, she said not a word, but went straight to her work of packing such pleasing belongings as she hoped might mitigate the troubles and trials of her new home. She didn't want to go a bit, but, since that didn't alter the fact that she must go, she philosophically prepared for the trip.

And so her New York apartment was in a state of dismantlement when Polly Elliot came flying in to make her a farewell call. Except at formal functions, Polly Elliot always flew in—though, of course, the phrase is used figuratively. But the young woman's nature was so



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impulsive, and her decisions were so sudden, that hasty action was her habit.

It was the quality of the beauty of Polly Elliot that caused discussion. That she was beautiful, everybody admitted. The facts of her face were brown eyes, a perfectly shaped nose, and an adorable mouth—but the fancies of that same countenance were beyond all description. If uninterested or bored, Miss Elliot's face could assume an expression that brought it far down from the highest ranks of feminine beauty; but if she chose, or if occasion brought it about, Polly could show, in most versatile fashion, any type of charm, from the witchery of a "Carmen" to the subtle allurement of a "Mona Lisa."

Her dark eyes could grow large with innocent naïveté or narrow with sphinx-like mystery. Her scarlet mouth could droop at the corners with impelling pathos, or curve upward into dimpling merriment.

Most human faces possess some mobility, but it was the quality of Polly Elliot's expressions that made her beautiful, and that, incidentally, gave her the peculiar requirements that make this story possible.

Having flown into Mrs. Wyatt's library, she



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looked around at the scattered heaps of treasures, and, removing a hat, a bronze elephant, and an Indian basket from a chair, she appropriated the seat herself.

"I wish you weren't going away, Grace," she said, her lovely mouth drooping with an expression which would have driven a man to distraction, but which was quite wasted on her busy hostess.

"I wish so, too, Polly; but it's a case where wishes don't mean a thing. I hate to leave New York, but I must—and that's all there is about that. You ought to live in New York, Polly; it must be so tiresome, everlastingly bobbing in and out on trains."

"Not now, Grace, with all the tunnely contrivances, I don't mind the trip a bit. And I like my small-town home; we're really rather nice people in East Greenfield. My goodness! Who is that man?"

"What man?"

"That photograph on the bookshelf—the large one."

"Oh, that's my cousin, Allan Farrington. He's been in Egypt a year or more, excavating things, or something like that, and he's just come back to New York."

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"I never saw the picture before."

"No, it's been put away. I just unearthed it with a lot of old photographs. But you needn't look at him, Polly, with that appropriating glance. He's a confirmed woman-hater."

"Woman-haters are always confirmed. I never heard of one that wasn't. But, Grace, I saw that man last night at dinner."

"Well, that's not so very astounding. I suppose a woman-hater must dine. Did he fall a victim to your charms, after the manner of his sex?"

"No; he didn't see me. It was an awfully big dinner—at the Leffingwells. At small tables, you know. And I left early, so we didn't meet. But I saw him across the room. And I rather liked him."

"Well, you may as well unlike him, then, for he'll never know it. Nobody can do anything with Allan. He's as impenetrable as one of those rock tombs he's always hacking at. You may take the picture if you have room for it. I haven't."

"Hm!" said Polly; but when she went away she took the photograph with her.

That was the twenty-seventh day of De-



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HIS SEX?"

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cember. Miss Elliot's swiftness of plan and execution has been heretofore remarked.

Returning from the city to her pretty home in East Greenfield, she went straight to her own boudoir and planned a campaign of amusement that in originality and daring was worthy of a greater cause.

She set her newly acquired photograph on a table in front of her, and addressed it with directness:

"You're one of the nicest men I ever saw," she observed, as she scrutinized the picture; "and, moreover, you have intelligence and, apparently, strength of character and a will of your own. All of which traits are most attractive to me, Mr. Farrington, and they arouse in me what is probably an undue and uncalled-for interest in you. Now, of course, I could meet you easily enough, as we must have a mutual friend in Mrs. Leffingwell, but I don't propose to pursue that course. First, because it's too tame and uninteresting, and, secondly, because if you met me that way we shouldn't interest each other at all! So, Mr. Allan Farrington, as I have made up my mind that you shall take some sort of interest in me—yes, in me, myself, Miss Polly Elliot—I hereby declare that

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I shall bring it about in the course of a year."

Polly nodded her head at the photograph with a smile and a glance that would have brought almost any man to her feet without a year's delay, but the good-looking face in the photograph seemed to answer her negatively, with its grave, unsmiling regard.

The original of that handsome face was equally grave and unsmiling when on New-Year's Day he encountered a rather large, square envelop in his morning's mail.

Nor did his expression show greater interest after he had clipped it open and discovered that it inclosed a photograph. The picture was mounted on a stiff gray cardboard, in one corner of which was a tiny calendar for the month of January. Not for a year—merely the January sheet of a tiny calendar was pasted on.

The photograph showed a beautiful girl in a black-velvet winter costume, with a big, black-feathered hat, and the voluminous arrangement of furs that the current fashion demanded. The face was half hidden by the lifted muff, above which large dark eyes smiled roguishly, but not coquettishly. The pose was very like "La

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Femme au Manchon," and the lovely face showed the same frank, good-comrade expression, and the same roguery in the eyes. The background was a snowy street and a high iron fence of slender palings. The arrangement of black and white was exceedingly good, and, though the picture was evidently taken by an amateur, it was of worthy composition. A softening touch was added by a small filmy scarf round the girl's neck, with an end fluttering over her shoulder.

"An advertisement," said Farrington to himself, but his glance rested on it a moment longer than was his usual attention to an advertisement, as he looked for the firm name. Not seeing any, he concluded that it was merely a clever dodge of some insurance company to attract his attention. But it didn't succeed, and he threw the picture aside without a further thought.

Nor did it again recur to his mind for more than a fortnight.

And then a strange thing happened. In his mail there arrived a small, flat box, which, when opened, disclosed a closely folded and very feminine-looking bit of material.

Shaking it out somewhat gingerly, Farrington

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saw it was a woman's scarf—gray, with an indistinct white-figured border.

Allan Farrington was peculiarly sensitive to touch, and for a moment he crushed the soft, silky mass in his hand, in sheer delight at the mere feeling of it. Then he shook it out again, and looked at it without actual curiosity, but with a slight surprise that the thing should be in his mail. Again the delight of its silky softness appealed to him, and he held it crumpled against his cheek. It was not in the least an appeal of the femininity of the thing, but a mere physical enjoyment of the soft material. But a faint elusive fragrance was perceptible, and the woman-hater threw the scarf impatiently on his desk.

"What the devil—" he began, which was perhaps excusable, as there was no one to hear him, and the situation was amazing.

And then, by some strange suggestion of subconsciousness, the faint pattern across the end of the scarf seemed to him familiar. His mind, carefully trained to accuracy, immediately connected it with the picture of The Girl with the Muff. That foolish advertisement he had received had shown a scarf of this pattern! Without special interest, but because of his habit of investigat-

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ing details, he tossed over a pile of circulars and pamphlets to find the picture. And when he found it, and looked at it with some degree of attention, he began to think it was not an advertisement. The photograph, the mounting, and the calendar page in the corner all bore unmistakable impress of personality. And beyond all shadow of doubt, the scarf now in his possession was the original of the scarf in the picture!

Though not afflicted with what is called "detective instinct," Farrington possessed a strong trait of inquisitiveness, which had been cultivated and improved by his tasks of research and excavation.

Deciding that the scarfs were the same, he asked himself, blandly, what it meant. And his answer to himself was that there was a mistake somewhere. The picture and the scarf had doubtless been meant for some other man, who would appreciate them as Farrington could never do.

He examined the wrapping-paper and saw his own name plainly typewritten and his address equally clear and unmistakable. He lived at this time in rather snug quarters in a somewhat pretentious hotel in Laurelton, an attractive

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place, north out of New York. He had chosen this for a temporary home, in preference to staying in the city, that he might have leisure and solitude in which to continue his work.

However mistaken the sender might be in mailing these things to him, there certainly was no mistake in the address. The picture calendar in its large envelop showed precisely the same address, and was quite evidently done with the same typewriter.

Looking at the calendar page, he now saw that a line was drawn round the number seventeen. It was the seventeenth of January that had brought the scarf in the mail, and he quickly concluded that this was not merely coincidence.

He turned his attention fully on the picture. The girl was beautiful, there was no doubt about that. Her expression was charming, merry, and a bit mischievous; but not in the least forward or flirtatious. The picture was wonderfully well taken, the scarf was a delicious thing to hold, and the whole affair was mysterious. But, after all, the only worthwhile element in it was the scarf; for the girl and the mystery Farrington cared nothing.

He returned the picture to its envelop, and, though he honored it so far as to put it in a

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desk drawer instead of among the pamphlets, he immediately forgot all about it.

The scarf, however, he kept by him; and, as Schiller kept a certain variety of apples near him while he worked, so Allan Farrington held that scarf crumpled in his left hand or rubbed it absent-mindedly against his face while he wrote his abstruse and erudite papers.

CHAPTER II



ELL!" said Allan Farrington, conservatively. "Well!"

The word was absurdly inadequate to the situation; but the speaker was not accustomed always to express all he thought. It was the first day of February, and the morning mail had come. It had contained a large envelop with the same typewritten address that Farrington had seen twice before. The envelop had contained a mounted photograph of the same size and shape as the one he had previously received, and, incidentally, of the same girl.

This time the picture showed an interior—unmistakably a woman's boudoir. There were foolish furnishings of a Marie Antoinette persuasion, and near the elaborate dressing-table the girl stood, a vision of loveliness in full evening dress. The long, simple lines of her gown suited exactly the slender, graceful figure; and the face, in profile, was even more

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lovely than in the smiling January picture. Standing before the mirror, in which her reflection showed dimly, she was drawing on her long gloves; but her attention was not on what she was doing.

Instead, she was gazing at a picture in a frame, which stood on the table before her.

At first glance this picture seemed to Allan Farrington to look like a photograph of himself. Of course, it was impossible; but in his methodical way he reached for a magnifying-glass and looked at it closely. There was no doubt about it, it *was* his own photograph! And it was framed, and on the dressing-table of a girl whom he did not know, and had no wish to know. Moreover, the girl was looking at it with such evident intent of emphasizing that fact, that the whole matter began to assume a personal aspect.

Thinking backward, Allan Farrington remembered those pictures of his. They had been taken just before he went on his long trip, and he had given away a great many, not only to friends, but to the public press as well. However, this picture showed a written inscription across the corner; but even through his powerful glass it could not be read. He wondered

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idly if he could have given his picture to this girl without remembering it. But, looking again at the girl, it did not seem probable.

As has been said, Polly Elliot's power of accenting her own beauty by charming expression was unusual, and this power did not desert her in troublous times of photography. On the contrary, she adored having her picture taken, and was always at her best, or one of her bests, before a camera.

The glass showed other details of the room's furnishings. The brushes of monogrammed ivory, the frippery French ornaments, and even the carved silver frame on his own picture were clearly discernible. It was a delightful room, and made a harmonious setting for the Girl.

Although not in the least interested, Farrington had come to think of her with a capital G, and, as he turned his eyes to the February calendar sheet pasted on the lower corner, he instinctively looked for a marked date. Nor was he disappointed. The fourteenth showed a line drawn round it, and Farrington's prophetic soul told him he would get a valentine.

He couldn't make it out. But then he had no desire to.

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He laid the photograph away in the drawer with the other, but he did not toss it in; and between the first and the fourteenth of February he took it out twice to look at it. To look at it coldly, but carefully. To look at it with what he would not admit was interest, but a mere idle curiosity.

He compared it with the January picture, and admitted that the Girl was a beauty; but concluded that she was either unpleasantly unconventional and forward, or else that there was still some possibility of a mistake.

But it was with a thrill of anticipation that he looked over his mail on the morning of the fourteenth of February, and with a throb of satisfaction that he saw what was certainly a valentine.

The large, white, embossed envelop brought back his earlier years—for since his high-school days he had not seen this Sacred-to-Cupid style of stationery. The typewritten address was exactly like the others from the same source; and he sat abstractedly looking at the white missive before he opened it. Also he took from the drawer the February calendar picture, and set it upon the desk before him.

"You're a little fool," he remarked, quite

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dispassionately, but he smiled at the photograph as he spoke—"a perfect little idiot, to cut up these tricks on me, if, indeed, you really mean them for me. But, of course, milady, with that unmistakable photograph of my noble self in your possession, I think I must conclude that you do mean your attentions for me."

He cut open the embossed envelop and took out a valentine—a real, regulation, old-fashioned valentine, with lace paper all round and pink and blue pictures of hearts and darts and cupids and turtle-doves. He turned back the lace leaf, and on the inner page, beneath an emotional picture of two winged hearts, he read the lines:

Hearts have wings on St. Valentine's Day,
And fly to each other from far away.

"Aren't you a little precipitate?" he said, looking quizzically at the girl's photograph; "your heart may be flying to me, but I cannot confess to a cardiac aeroplane of my own. You're daring, and you're original in your methods; but you've picked out the wrong target for your shafts. I could wish you had aimed them at an easier mark; but, my Girl,

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the more I look at you the more I think that you only care to try difficult feats. You have marvelous courage, and a fearlessness worthy of a better cause; but it is wasted on me, and I wish I could tell you so."

But though this soliloquy would seem to indicate Farrington's utter lack of interest in the whole affair, yet he sat for a long time studying the various documents in the case. He persuaded himself that it was merely the attraction of an impersonal problem, and for a moment he almost thought of putting the typewritten address into the hands of a private detective. He knew that typewriting could be traced almost as easily as pen-writing; but he rejected this idea before it was fully formed, as it did not at all appeal to his taste.

February went on, and, though called the shortest month in the year, it seemed to Farrington the longest he had ever known.

Although still unwilling to admit to himself any interest in all this foolishness, he confessed to a curiosity that he considered merely human.

But at last the first of March came, and with it the third calendar picture.

Eagerly he drew it from the envelop and saw the Girl, prettier than ever!

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She stood on an upper veranda or balcony, and the picture might have been named "A Windy Day." Her hair and clothing were blown about, and her smiling face showed her enjoyment of the March gale. She wore no hat, and she had on a large and roomy sort of polo coat, of swagger cut and carefully tailored lines. Farrington's peculiarly quick eye for details noted this before he looked at the laughing face. Across her brow a lock of hair was blown—a curling wisp of considerable thickness. More curls were blowing around her neck and ears, and Allan noted for the first time that the girl had truly marvelous hair.

Then he observed the rest of the picture. It was, like the others, wonderfully well taken, and the background was an open window into what was unmistakably the same boudoir that had appeared in the February picture. His own photograph in its silver frame was discernible on the dressing-table, and Farrington felt an absurd feeling of at-homeness as he saw this.

He could form no opinion of the house, as only the window and a small portion of the balcony showed; but it was clearly not a city house. The bare branches of a tree cut across

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one upper corner, and a bit of ornate shingling seemed to betoken a country place.

At last he concentrated his attention on the Girl's face. The expression was winsome, not in the least coquettish or vain, but seemingly showing a joy in braving the tricks of the mad March wind. One little hand held the loose coat together, while the other vainly tried to tuck back the wind-blown hair.

"You're a witch," Farrington observed, a little grudgingly, for it was his first tribute to her personality, and it was forced from him. "You have designs on me, but you can't carry them out. In fact, you have spiked your own guns. If ever I see a young woman even remotely resembling you, I shall turn and flee at the top of my speed!"

But instead of fleeing mentally from the charm of the picture, he glanced down at the calendar in the corner of it, deliberately looking for a marked date—which he found.

"The twelfth," he murmured. "Do you think, Saucebox, I shall wait impatiently for your old twelfth? Not so; I shall not think of it in the mean time, and I sha'n't open your ridiculous present when it comes. Probably this time you'll send me your glove or slipper,

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or some such fool thing. No, you are not the kind of a woman I admire. And so, here you go, all of you!"

He bundled into the open drawer the three pictures, the valentine, and the scarf, and banged the drawer shut. Only, however, to open it a moment later, and somewhat shamefacedly pull out the scarf.

Notwithstanding his vaunted indifference, he came toward his desk on the morning of March 12th with an undisguisable look of anticipation.

The envelop was small. It was the best of all the correct styles of that year, and was addressed and stamped with precision.

"Rather decent," commented the recipient, as he held it between finger and thumb; "thought it would be deckle-edged and scented. No," he added, quickly, "I take that back. You show poor taste, Girl, in addressing me at all; but except for that there is no flaw in your work."

Deliberately he cut open the envelop and slowly drew forth the folded sheet of paper. It contained no writing, but held a long lock of brown hair, tied at the end with a tiny bow of blue ribbon.

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"Hm!" Farrington observed, "we're progressing. A lock of hair usually implies a tender sentiment that is mutual. Little Girl, you've gone too far this time. I think I can't forgive—by Jove! I believe it's that blamed lock of hair that blew around in the March picture!"

With the first impulsive gesture he had shown in the matter, Farrington jerked open the drawer and took out the picture. There was no doubt about it. The lock of brown hair in his hand was the original of the curl blowing across the photographed face. It gave him a strange, almost uncanny feeling. For the first time he realized that the Girl was a living, breathing person, and not merely a myth. Moreover, there was something very attractive about the ribbon-tied curl. Farrington was not more sentimental than most men; but he had a touch of old-fashioned sentiment in his nature, and the lock of hair, tied with its bit of blue lute-string, seemed to him, just then, the dearest possible touch of romance.

"I don't know which it is," he said, speaking directly to the March picture; "either you've queered the whole thing by this latest prank of yours, or else you've laid the ax at the root

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of the tree! If it's the latter—and I'm by no means sure it is—you must be very careful how you proceed; and if it's the former—which is far more likely—all is over between us."

Almost unconsciously he laid the tress of hair against his lips, and then suddenly realized his action.

"That settles it!" he exclaimed, angrily, as he pushed the lock back in its envelop and threw it into the open drawer. "I won't be made a fool of by a silly school-girl who has sent me one of her latest bought curls!"

Then, with a sudden glance at the March picture, he said, quietly: "I beg your pardon for that, my March Girl; I know you incapable of anything of the sort. You are acting in a most mistaken fashion, but you sha'n't be misunderstood. And now to prove my faith in you, though I have not the slightest personal interest in you, I will use your March picture for a calendar."

He set the cardboard mount on his large, flat-topped desk, bracing it against a pile of books, and thought with satisfaction that any chance observer would think it only a calendar of the usual Pretty Girl type. "And that's quite all it is," he emphatically assured himself.

CHAPTER III



T was positively absurd the way Farrington waited for the first of April. As the day came nearer he grew fidgety, for no reason except that he had a notion that the Girl would fool him by not sending any calendar at all. That was the obvious thing to do, and that's what he would have done had he been engineering the scheme.

And yet he couldn't help thinking that the Girl would not do the obvious. She never had, in all their acquaintance—and he was beginning now to feel fairly well acquainted with her. To be sure, he had only had six communications from her; but those he had studied so often and so carefully that he felt that he knew and liked her.

One couldn't help liking such a mannerly, well-behaved little person, and Farrington had had moments of thinking that the sending of the curl was nothing short of an inspiration of

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genius. To be sure, he had reactionary times, when he thought the opposite; but the fact that he thought about it at all was indicative.

And so the first of April found him actually awaiting the postman's whistle, and though, when his man brought in the mail, he was outwardly indifferent, he lost no time in opening his April calendar.

It was the boudoir again, and was a picture of such a warm, happy, cozy interior that Farrington caught his breath as he gazed.

It was a very rainy day, in the picture, and through the window could be seen slanting torrents that blurred the landscape.

(Much later Farrington learned that these slanting torrents had been cleverly scratched on the negative!)

The rainy day gave an added sense of delightful comfort to the room, and Farrington eagerly took in the details, one by one.

Apparently the Girl was enjoying an afternoon to herself. Tea was on a small table; on the couch was an open book, upside down; on a table another open book, a large one.

The Girl wore a bewildering garment of tea-gown effect. It was soft, with frilly laces and fluttering ribbons, and trailed away from her

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as she leaned over the arm of her big easy-chair. She was engrossed in her occupation, which was nothing less than decorating Farrington's own photograph with a garland of flowers! The smiling face was looking at the photograph with an expression which, at that moment, Allan would willingly have seen turned toward himself.

The Girl's attitude and bearing were dainty and lovely beyond words to express, and no man on earth would have denied that it was a lucky dog whose picture was being garlanded in such circumstances.

Farrington had the grace to blush a little, for it seemed that he had no right to be thus elevated to a special honor, when in his heart he scorned the girl who was doing it—at least, he was almost sure he scorned her.

"If she weren't so infernally naïve, and good form, generally," he muttered, and then made a dive for his magnifying-glass to examine the picture further.

"Sherlock hunting for clues," he thought, as he smiled grimly at himself.

The glass disclosed that the open volume on the couch was *Bunner's Poems!* The name of the big book on the table was not legible; but

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the tome somehow gave the appearance of being a complete Shakespeare.

"Posing!" he declared. "The Bunner isn't so bad; but an open Shakespeare is distinctly a pose! She's only a high-school girl, after all, or perhaps a New England college girl. I wonder what her name is? But, of course, it's either Margaret or Dorothy. All girls of her age are named one or the other. But I'm not going to call her by her name. *I think*—" And he looked at the picture thoughtfully. "*I think* I shall call you Neræa. I wonder why? Oh!" for suddenly it had come to him why he chose the name.

"I may as well own up," he said, still speaking to the picture and laughing in a slight embarrassment. "I suppose I am 'caught in the tangles of Neræa's hair!' You've scored, but let me warn you that you'll have hard work to keep it up at this pace! You nearly fell down on that lock-of-hair performance, and if I didn't have a foolish liking for old-fashioned games I wouldn't have stood for it! And you won't strike twelve every time, so I'll gather the roses while I may, for all too soon, Neræa, you will break our pretty soap-bubble and prove yourself fallible after all!"

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Farrington had set all four of his calendar pictures in a row, and as he looked from one to the other he almost wished he could know a girl who could pose so faultlessly and with such a perfect lack of self-consciousness before a camera.

"It seems a little unfair, Neræa," he said, "for you to do it all and get no response or even appreciation of your cleverness. But you give me no opportunity to talk back, and, of course, that's part of your cleverness. Incidentally, I hate a clever woman; but I don't hate you, for I have no personal feeling toward you of any sort, any more than I have toward the girls in a Christy or Fisher calendar."

Farrington voiced this amazing whopper, and then, for the first time, looked on the calendar for the April date. It was the twenty-first.

"Allah il Allah!" he exclaimed, for he rather favored Oriental expletives; "how does that minx know the twenty-first is my birthday, or doesn't she? If she does, then I suppose she's some third or fourth cousin, or some connection of the family, for surely my birthday is not a national holiday."

It was characteristic of the man's lack of

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egotism that he did not remember that his birth date was published in several variations of *Who's Who*, and that he who ran might at any time read.

And so, for twenty-one days, he alternated in his opinions as to whether the troublesome intruder upon his thoughts was about to make him a birthday present or not.

On the twenty-first a parcel came. Before he opened it he knew it was a book, and scowled accordingly.

"Great mistake, Neræa," he growled, to the row of four pictures, which were set up in honor of the day, "to send a book. It's trite and obvious, conventional and *banal*. I'm surprised at you! Of course, something may depend on what the book is; but the safest rule for everybody is never to give a book to anybody else."

He cut the string slowly, with a whimsical feeling that the crash of his air-castle must be delayed as long as possible; and he opened the paper to see the identical volume of *Bunner's Poems* that showed in the April picture.

"Oh, *Girl*, you're all right, after all!" he exclaimed. "Forgive me for doubting you!"

He opened the little volume, and the fly-leaf

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showed that a small rectangle of its paper had been cut away.

"Her own name," nodded Allan—"sent me one of her own books. Good!"

Beneath the cut-out was an inscription in pen-writing. It ran:

"For your Birthday." And below was a quotation from Shakespeare:

I wish you all the joy that you can wish.

"Ah, so that explains the open Shakespeare. Not a bad selection if one must write on a fly-leaf. Well, Miss Impertinence, I hope your wish will come true; but few people ever get all the joy they want. And I hope you don't think that you could give me any, or that you are giving me any by this foolishness of yours. I don't care a rap for the whole business, and I wish I had some way to let you know that I have already quite enough pictures of your fairly pretty face. You have no sense of maidenly reserve, no—"

Farrington broke off abruptly in his soliloquy, for he was looking straight at the April picture, and he could not continue in such palpably untrue statements about the Girl.

"I beg your pardon," he said to the picture.

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"Whatever your conduct may indicate, your face is certainly the sweetest thing that ever escaped from Heaven. There, have I made up for my brutal speeches?"

Then Farrington turned his attention to the book of poems. Though slightly familiar with Bunner's verses, many were new to him, and he couldn't help enjoying them. Moreover, the book had a most personal air, and seemed to partake of the loveliness of the sender. It was not marked in any place, for which Farrington was duly grateful; but it fell open more easily at some pages than others, and he could easily discern which poems were favorites.

"You're growing on me," he said, nodding at the picture, "and it won't do. Don't you know I'm a confirmed woman-hater? Of course you do, you Audacious Person, that's why you're doing all this! Well, I hate you, as I do all the rest of your sex, and I show it thus."

He bundled all the pictures into the drawer and banged it shut. But he left the book out—and the scarf.

Already Farrington had been subjected to much chaff concerning that scarf. His men friends were in the habit of dropping in upon him at unexpected moments; and, though they

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had never seen any of the calendar pictures, they had often seen the scarf, which was usually not far from its present owner.

But their innuendos as to its feminine implication jarred Farrington's serenity not at all. He declared the simple truth, that he liked the scarf because of the pleasing texture of its materials; and its continued presence in his room seemed to prove his word.

He spent much of his birthday reading the book of verses and cogitating over the whole affair. To himself he excused his neglect of work by informing himself that he had a right to make a holiday of his birthday. As no one else recognized the day, and as he had no other gifts, he felt especially lenient toward the mischievous intruder upon his solitude. He determined henceforth to use the calendar openly all through each month, and, though he occasionally thought better of this impulse, yet many days the pictures stood on his desk all day.

From his birthday until the first of May was not so very long to wait; but it seemed ages. He no longer denied to himself that he was interested, though he insisted that his only interest was curiosity.

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The calendar came duly on the first of May. If he had looked—and he had—for a personal note in the picture, he was disappointed. The photograph might easily pass as a page of any "Girl Calendar."

The scene was a garden, or rather a lawn, on which was assembled a May party. The Girl was Queen of May, and sat under a bower of vines and flowers. She was crowned with blossoms, and held a floral scepter, while about her were grouped ladies-in-waiting, courtiers, and pages.

The thing was not overdone. It was rather English in its effects, and everybody in the picture seemed to be having a jolly good time.

The Queen was smiling, and, as this was the first picture Allan had seen of her full face, he realized anew its wonderful charm and the girl's marvelous freedom from self-consciousness.

Her May-queen costume, with its veil and wreath, made her look almost like a bride, but her merry smile and evident air of gaiety seemed to prove her heart-free youth.

The men and girls who stood near her were clearly portrayed, and Farrington scanned their faces eagerly, hoping to find a familiar face.

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But they were all strangers to him, though unmistakably of his own class. He experienced a sense of annoyance as he studied the picture, and suddenly realized, with a start, that it was because of the proximity of these smiling men to his Queen of May.

This was his first thought of proprietorship in the Girl, and, though it shocked him to realize it, he candidly admitted it.

"You're a coquette," he observed, nodding his head at the picture. "You had this photograph made purposely for me. You had these men hanging round you purposely to tease me. And, by Jove, you've succeeded! I don't care for your prettiness, I detest your cleverness, and I'm utterly disgusted with the way you fire these things at me; but I'm going to tell you that I recognize your charm. You have more of that, in that flower face of yours, than any woman I've ever seen. If I were to see you, I might be disillusioned, for nobody could be as perfect as you look. So go on with your game, my Girl, and I'll admire you as an ideal woman; but Heaven preserve me from ever knowing your real self! And now, to see when I'm going to get another of your absurd offerings."

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He looked at the calendar, and discovered the usual faint line drawn around the figure two.

"Not long to wait," he growled, half annoyed at being deprived of his usual time of anticipation.

And when the next day an envelop came, it contained only a blank sheet of paper inclosing one pink rose petal.

"Coquette!" he said, disdainfully, to the smiling May Queen. "Flirt! I suppose you think that I'm impressed by your roguery and foolish wiles. I don't care a snap for your old pink petal, and if you think I'm going to put it in the back of my watch-case, you're terribly mistaken, that's all!"

Whereupon Allan Farrington, grave and reverend seigneur, and authority on Egyptian excavations, deliberately drew out his watch, opened the back case, and, laying the pink petal carefully inside, closed it with a snap.

Then, with a sigh, he faced the long, lonely month of May.

Many times he stormed at the smiling May Queen. He poured vials of wrath on her flower-crowned head.

"What do you mean," he railed, "by leaving me twenty-nine days without a word? I sup-

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pose you're flirting around with those ridiculous men in this picture! If it weren't that I don't want to flatter your vanity so much, I'd stick a postage stamp on every one of their smug faces!"

By which it will be seen that Mr. Farrington was growing positively childish. But he had reaction. Often he dismissed the whole troublesome subject, slammed everything into the desk drawer, and shut and locked it for almost two days at a time.

At times he decided to probe the mystery. He studied the postmarks, only to learn that everything was mailed in one of the New York City branch offices. The typewriting was plain, neat, and inconspicuous. The handwriting, of which he had only the inscription in the Bunner book, was the average writing of the modern young woman. It had a good style of its own, but it seemed to indicate nothing more than the photographs had already shown.

He was not inclined to employ a detective, and he could deduce nothing himself regarding the girl's identity. He thought of putting a "Personal" in the papers, but dismissed the idea as being unworthy of the game as she played it.

CHAPTER IV



ND so, somehow, May dragged itself away, and Farrington looked forward to the first of June with undenied impatience.

The calendar arrived, and an uncontrollable exclamation of delight escaped him as he saw it.

It was quite the loveliest picture he had ever seen. In an old-fashioned garden, among rows of bloom, the Girl stood, leaning against a sun-dial.

Perhaps the still life and accessories were a little studied; but the composition was so perfect, the harmony so complete, that the picture looked like a photograph of a *Salon* painting.

She wore a simple, trailing gown, her hair was massed low on her neck, and her exquisite profile revealed classic lines hitherto unsuspected. A long end of narrow ribbon, which seemed to belong to her gown, was caught up

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in her left hand, and in her right, though Farrington had recourse to his glass to make sure of this, she held a small pair of scissors.

The meaning was not clear. Farrington wondered if she were personating one of the Fates, but decided against the theory as being pointless.

"Oh," he exclaimed, suddenly possessed of an inspiration, "she's going to snip off that ribbon and send it to me! Very pretty, my dear—very pretty—but a little too obvious. Not quite original enough for one of your caliber. However, I forgive you anything, since you've sent me this picture. If you really look like that—but, of course, you don't. You are an expert at being photographed, and whoever takes these pictures is the most wonderful camera artist I have ever known."

And then a sudden, foolish pang smote Farrington's heart as he wondered if one of those smug-faced men was responsible for the photography.

The marked date for June was the third, and again he experienced that vague regret that she had not put it nearer the middle of the month.

"But it will only be that bit of ribbon," he

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assured himself, and then he deliberately gave himself up to the pleasure of the thought of owning a bit of her ribbon.

"You're getting maudlin, old man," he informed himself, frankly, "but in the face of that picture, I don't blame you. Since she's only a myth anyway, thank your stars she's such a heavenly-faced myth!"

Locking away the other pictures, he stood the June calendar on his desk, and, though it was exclaimed at and commented on, no one suspected it was other than a commercial product.

More than one inquired where he bought it, but without receiving a satisfactory answer.

On the third of June the envelop came, with the ribbon. It was white, not more than an inch wide, and a trifle less than three inches long. It didn't seem much, and Farrington was a little disappointed. But even while he was looking at it a telegraph messenger came with a "night letter."

Without thought of her in connection with the message, he opened it, and glancing first at the signature he saw, "Mary."

Farrington knew several women named Mary, but none who were likely to send him a tele-

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gram. However, that did not deter him from reading the message:

"Mr. Allan Farrington. If you care to have the calendar continue, wear the ribbon at G.'s wedding. Mary."

"Hm!" was the comment this instruction received. "If you love me, wear a red rose in your hair! Me child, me child! but sa-ave the papers! Little friend, you have gone too far! I'm sorry, but I can't stand for melodrama. I will receive your scraps of ribbon and your little faded flowers, but I can't decorate myself with them in public. And who is G. anyway, and when is he going to be married?"

Then his thoughts came back to him, and he realized that on the very next day he was to be best man at Harland's wedding. But Harland's name was Will, and there wasn't any G. about it. But wait, he was to marry Gladys Henderson! Then the G. was for Gladys—consequently, Gladys was a friend of Mary's. His Mary! And she would be at Gladys's wedding, and he would see her and speak with her! This was disaster! Had his office been anything less than that of best man, he would have refused to go to the wedding.

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He could not bring himself to crush his soap-bubble in any such fashion.

Thoughts came crowding thick and fast. If Mary were there, and if he wore the ribbon, and if he met her, where was the fun of the calendar after that? The glamor gone, the illusion vanished, nothing left but a dull and probably not very good-looking reality!

What a silly name—Mary! And pray where was he to wear the ribbon? In his hair? And to what would it commit him? At least, to a desire to continue the receipt of those confounded photographs.

And how did Mary know he was going to the wedding? Oh, of course, Gladys had told her. They were probably confidential chums, and Mary had told Gladys, between giggles, the whole ridiculous story! He only knew Gladys slightly; his friendship was with Harland.

Well, of course, he couldn't get out of being best man at that late date; but he had no intention of prancing down the aisle with a fish-tail end of white ribbon pinned on for a badge.

He read the telegram again. It didn't say so, but he felt a strong conviction that if he didn't wear the white ribbon he would get

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no more calendars. Well, better so. There couldn't be a more beautiful picture than the June one, and so it was a fitting climax to the whole foolish affair. He knew Mary well enough to know that she would stick to her word. No ribbon, no pictures!

Well, in that case, how *could* he wear the ribbon?

To be sure, the gardenia, or whatever foolish *boutonnière* they provided for him at the wedding pageant, would admit of having a tiny scrap of white ribbon tucked into it without looking like anything more absurd than a wedding favor. In fact, as best man, his lapel decoration would need a little touch like that. It was almost a badge of office. Yes, quite aside from its meaning to Mary, that tag of ribbon would be entirely appropriate for a best man to wear.

"How thoughtful of you to send it to me," he murmured, ironically, to the picture. "Dear Mary!"

But then, the addition of the insignia would mean encouragement to Mary's foolishness! And worse, it would mean Mary's pouncing on him and making a scene right before the whole assembly! No, it would not do. Allan Far-

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rington could not jeopardize his dignity to that extent. If he could trust Mary not to make a scene; but with her predilection for getting in the lime-light—as evidenced by her flaunting photographs—there was no telling *what* she would do! And, too, perhaps Mary was to be a bridesmaid, or even maid of honor! Fancy his escorting Mary down the aisle with that blatant white ribbon waving in the breeze!

"You've blocked the game!" he exclaimed, angrily, at the June picture. "You've overreached yourself and spoiled the whole thing! You have no sense of moderation, no restraint, no delicate perception of values!"

And then, as he looked at the wonderful picture of the wonderful girl, standing by the sun-dial, holding in her hand the ribbon—the veritable ribbon—he wavered.

"You're worth it," he said, with a long-drawn sigh. "You can harness me with white ribbons and drive me up the aisle if you want to. I surrender!"

But, of course, the next morning his mood had changed again. After telephoning with Harland about some matter-of-fact details of the wedding ceremony, Farrington fell back again into the atmosphere of real life, and con-

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cluded that he could not brave all the chances that the white ribbon would bring.

And when at last it was time to dress to go to the wedding, which was at noon, and in church, he laid the ribbon—the absurd, impudent ribbon—on the chiffonnier before him, and calmly remarked, directly to it: “I don’t know yet whether I’ll wear you or not.”

With commendable will-power, Farrington turned his attention to other matters as he arrayed himself in the purple and fine linen that became a nuptial occasion. But the purely subjective reward given by virtue is often unsatisfying, and his will-power bent a little as he involuntarily allowed his June calendar to come within the focus of his vision. Indeed, so great was the reaction occasioned by a sight of this picture that he tied his tie with a smile of affirmative decision. Then he donned his waistcoat with a negative frown. But he pushed into his coat sleeves with an air of uncertainty.

Reaching for a handkerchief, he came perilously near the ingratiating bit of white satin trumpery; but he shook his head at it with a fine smile of patronizing indifference. Then he snatched it up and held it against his coat

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lapel. The effect was that of a delegate to a temperance-meeting.

Then, deliberately and with the expression that Cæsar must have worn when casting his historic die, Farrington dropped the white ribbon into his waste-basket, picked up his hat and gloves, and grandly stalked from the room.

Now, of course, Bumpus was an awfully nice dog. Pedigree, and all that. But he had acquired his name from his predilection for bumping into people.

And he was no respecter of persons. Nor yet of persons' wearing-apparel.

So, when Allan Farrington appeared on his ken, Bumpus said good morning in his usual sensational way. This merry mode of procedure was to jump lightly and unexpectedly and land with his forepaws impartially distributed against the person of his victim.

Wherefore, this being accomplished, two dusty footprints appeared on the immaculate tails of Allan Farrington's wedding garment.

Not being a man given to expletives, Farrington said nothing, but straightway took his handkerchief and flicked off the offending dust.

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This was easy, and left the handkerchief only slightly rumpled, but still inadmissible as part of a best man's get-up.

So, of course, Farrington returned to his room for a fresh handkerchief. He accumulated two, in case of further mishap, and then, somewhat absent-mindedly abstracting a bit of white ribbon from his waste-basket, he pocketed it and left the room. Skilfully evading Bumpus this time, he got into the car that was waiting for him and hastened to the wedding.

"But," he soliloquized, as he rolled along, "I wonder what excuse I *could* have made to go back if it hadn't been for that rascally dog?"

CHAPTER V



HE wedding was one of those frivolous-minded affairs, for which Mr. Mendelssohn and Mr. Wagner are doubtless largely responsible. The scenic effects were little short of marvelous. The church was smiling with floral flubdub, and politely dressed people were crowding in.

Farrington went around to the vestry, or whatever is called the room where bridegroom and best man congregate.

He found Harland fidgeting in correct anteceremony fashion.

The absurd thought passed through his mind that Harland, with his wedding fairly under way, had nothing to fidget about; it was he, Farrington, with a burning bit of ribbon in his pocket, who ought to do the fidgeting.

Harland regarded his friend critically. "What's the matter, old man?" he said. "You look preoccupied—as it might be yourself who

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is getting married. Not that you've the remotest fighting chance of such a thing."

"Huh!" Farrington remarked, pleasantly.

"Well, wake up and put me through my paces. Have you the ring?"

"Yes, two; in case I fumble one and drop it."

"All right. Now, watch out for the signal. It must be time for us to go in."

"No, there's five minutes yet. I say, Harland, I'm undecided about something."

"I should say you were! You show it in every feature of your finely chiseled face. But do let your decision wait until Gladys and I have begun to live happy ever after. Jove! I didn't know best men were so peevish! I'll never have one again; I'll best for myself next time."

"Say, Harland, decide for me, won't you?"

"Well, I will. I decide yes. I say yes to everything to-day; it's my affirmative day. Yes, Farrington; let it be yes."

"That settles it; it's no. I made up my mind, whatever you said, I'd do the opposite."

"Well, I'm glad you've made up your idiot mind to something. There, isn't that the signal? Yes, it is! Come on. Hay foot,

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straw foot! I'm all right—but do keep yourself awake!"

The two men went through the vestry door, and as Allan Farrington fell a step behind the bridegroom he snatched a bit of white ribbon from his waistcoat pocket, and thrust it into the conventional and expensive nosegay that decorated his lapel.

Then, fortified with a hazy idea of a knight going forth to tourney, his nerve came back to him, and he went through his part so beautifully as to bring him, later, flattering encomiums from the tearful, pearl-clad mother of the bride.

At the reception Farrington's duties kept him busy. A best man's time is not his own during business hours. And what with dangling attendance on the bridal party, looking after Harland's personal effects, and superintending the entertainment and getaway of the happy pair, Mr. Allan Farrington had no time to waste on his own affairs.

She was not in the bridal cortège—of that he was sure. From flower-girl to matron of honor no bedecked bit of femininity could by any possibility be the girl of the photographs; and when he was at last at leisure to look for her

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he trod comparatively alone a banquet-hall pretty much deserted.

But even during the strain of his arduous labors he now and then glanced furtively at that foolish white badge of courage and half consciously touched it to make sure it was secure in its place.

Finally he made his adieu to the weary but complacently triumphant mother of the bride, and sped homeward alone with his thoughts in a limousine.

His thoughts were, after a classic fashion, divided into three parts. One, regret that he had definitely committed himself to a continuation of the foolishness; one, relief that Mary had not made herself known amid a blare of trumpets, as he had feared she would do; and one, a deep, underlying, and unconfessed satisfaction in the knowledge that in all human probability he had subscribed to that calendar for the rest of the year.

The wedding was on the fourth of June, and during the rest of the long, leafy month the days pushed one another off the earth with maddening slowness. He had had his June bestowal, and there was nothing to hope for until July! But it did seem as if his definite

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enlistment in the cause should have brought him some reward, or at least recognition. He doubted her presence at the wedding, anyway. He scanned the lists of guests in the newspaper accounts of the affair, but there were too many Marys to make the scanning of interest.

To be sure, he could take one of the pictures to Mrs. Henderson and ask her who it was; but it didn't seem quite playing the game to employ such means.

Still, as June wore on and the days grew lovelier and leafier, and as Allan Farrington was still young enough to have a turnable fancy, he did go on that very errand.

He went diffidently; he showed Mrs. Henderson the picture as if it were merely a calendar from a shop, and asked her if it resembled any one she knew.

"Why, no," said the lady. "I've never seen that girl, I'm sure."

"I thought I saw her at the wedding," pursued Farrington, mendaciously.

"She may have been here; of course, Gladys has friends with whom I'm not acquainted; and Mr. Harland's list contained people we didn't know. If she was at the wedding, she must have been a friend of one or the other,



"WHY, NO," SAID THE LADY; "I'VE NEVER SEEN THAT GIRL, I'M
SURE"

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or possibly a stranger brought by some guest. Gladys will tell you when she comes home."

"When is she coming home?"

"They've gone abroad, you know, and will stay two months at least. If it's important, Mr. Farrington, send the picture to her and ask her about it. I'll give you her address."

Send his June picture across the ocean! The bare idea of it made Farrington turn the subject so quickly that Mrs. Henderson never thought of it again; and Farrington went home with his secret a foolish thing, but his own.

The rest of June he waited. His moods varied, his interest waxed and waned at intervals; but the first of July found him waiting for the postman with all the impatience of a rustic swain waiting for his valentine.

True to its own record for punctuality, it came duly. Uniform in size and style with the others, it seemed to Farrington that it was a sweeter and more intimate Mary than any he had yet seen.

She sat in a hammock, and her frock was a simple, frilled white dimity. Farrington had no idea what dimity was—he scarcely knew what a frill was—and yet he felt a sudden, in-

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stant conviction that he was looking at a girl in frilled white dimity.

Above her head waved a large amount of leafiness, and at her feet was spread a lawn of velvety-looking grass. Farrington looked a little quizzically at the broad-leaved hat, wreathed with roses, that was flung carelessly on that same grass; but immediately he realized that it was needed in the composition of the picture.

Mary was writing a letter. She was not holding her pen with the handle pointing toward her shoulder in orthodox fashion, and gazing off into space, as writers are commonly represented, but she was scribbling with apparent interest, as a dimity-clad maid sitting in a hammock ought to scribble.

The picture seemed impersonal; as usual, it would have passed for a published calendar; but Farrington felt sure, positively sure, that Mary was writing to him.

"Not that I want a letter from you, you Bold-faced Jig!" he exclaimed to the picture. He had come across that epithet in print lately, and it seemed to him amazingly appropriate—partly because it seemed to convey a hint of tenderness.

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"I wouldn't read a letter from you if it came," he went on, to the Dimity Girl. "I'm tired of your tricks and your manners." And then he looked at the calendar to see what day the letter would come. And the calendar said the sixth.

That wasn't so very long to wait, and the Glorious Fourth helped to pass the time.

And, sure enough, on the sixth came a letter. A real letter, with pen-written address and of a fatness suggestive of several sheets.

As it turned out, however, the fatness was due to the expensive thickness of the note-paper; and, as Mary wrote a fair-sized hand, there wasn't such an awful lot of letter, after all.

The letter read thus:

ISRAFEEL,—Though I've no way of knowing, I call you that because, somehow, I feel sure your heartstrings are a lute. I wish I might have been the one to play on them; but I'm only a calendar, and calendars last but a year, and then they're thrown away. But I'm glad—I truly am—that you want the calendar for the rest of the year. Your white ribbon had a funny expression, though. As if you'd just smashed it into place at the last minute. Did you?

Israfeel, if you want to write to me, you may do so—just once. Address it to—let me see—this is July, and it is summertime. Address it to Julie Somers. And the place? Let me think. I'm sitting under a maple-tree.

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Send it then, if you care to, to Miss Julie Somers, Mapleville, New Jersey. Mail it in New York on the eighth, and I ask you, knowing that simple asking is sufficient, to make no effort to discover who I am or where I live. For wit ye wel, faire Sir, I am a Princess—la beale Mary—and my lightest word is law. You may have gathered from my unsought attentions to yourself that I am absurdly, even unduly interested in you. But it's only for a year, and what's a year more or less?

And so, Man, I have no wish for a multitude of letters that I might bundle into a blue ribbon; but one letter I want—and therefore I graciously permit its sending.

If inclined, you may send also a photograph of yourself taken in illuminative manner.

And I am, for the fleeting moment,

YOUR MARY.

Mr. Allan Farrington read his Mary's letter with what are usually termed varying emotions. He thought the writer an impudent minx, a silly school-girl, a deliberate *poseuse*, a troublesome element, and a darling. The fact that his last-named opinion of her permeated and dominated all the others was simply one more indication of the eternal triumph of the eternal feminine.

But, not knowing this, the deluded young man sat down at his desk to avail himself of the permission given him to write what he fondly hoped would be the masterpiece of his life's literary productions.

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Needless to tell how he filled his waste-basket with torn scraps of his failures. Needless to tell that he abandoned the idea of writing a masterpiece, or even a clever letter, and finally achieved only a commonplace screed that ran as follows:

MY MARY,—I suppose I may as well admit you have aroused a slight interest. Not due to your beauty, nor your audacity. Not even due to your originality or your cleverness. But I won't tell you what it is about you that holds for a moment my attention, for you might accent it until you became troublesome.

I certainly shall *not* send you a photograph of a mummer, posing self-consciously, in a conceited attempt to appear clever!

Moreover, I refuse to be bound by your command not to hunt you out. Should I feel sufficient interest—which is improbable—I shall use any means that occur to me.

I regret the necessity for the uninteresting tone of this letter; but one who deliberately offers a false name and address cannot expect a really personal response.

ALLAN FARRINGTON.

CHAPTER VI



It befell that, at an early hour on the ninth of July, Allan Farrington, confirmed woman-hater, stood in the small, quiet post-office that served the needs of Mapleville, New Jersey.

The Postmaster-General had never deemed it necessary to provide resting-places for the anxious supplicants for mail, so Allan Farrington stood for a long time.

His purpose there was, if might be, to see the lady whom he had addressed as Miss Julie Somers come and claim the document rightfully belonging to her.

And at length a young woman entered and, going directly to the delivery window, asked for the very letter he had in mind. He saw a trim, slight figure in black. The sedate face and severely plain garb did not send through every fiber of his being a startled conviction that this was his Mary. On the contrary, he felt sure it was not; and, from certain subtle but

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indescribable effects, he deductively concluded it was Mary's maid.

The young woman cast a furtive glance at him as she turned away, and Farrington went quickly toward her.

"You are, perhaps, a messenger sent for Miss Somers's mail," he said.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, in a respectful tone, but one indicative of reserve and capability.

"Ah! and will you be so kind as to give me Miss Somers's home address?"

"I cannot do that, sir; it is against my orders."

"Ah!" When Farrington was interested he always said "ah." "But you could carry a message to Miss Somers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then say to her that I shall continue to send letters to her at this address."

The maid opened her small hand-bag. "You are Mr. Farrington?" she said, with a brief glance at him.

"Yes."

"Then this note is for you." And Farrington received a bit of twisted paper.

Its message, unsigned, said only: "It is use-

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less to send further communications to Mapleville, as they will not be called for."

Allan Farrington raised his hat slightly, and the black-garbed maid walked away in the direction, as Farrington observed, of the railway station.

Disdaining to follow her, he waited for the next train, and then went back to New York, and so home.

His thoughts, a little chagrined, dwelt on the point that Mary had expected him to do just what he did do, and had sent the note, assuming that he would be there to receive it. But he also felt a complacency that he *had* fallen in with her plans, and realized comfortably that at any rate he was in for it now. What *it* might prove to be, he didn't know; but for the rest of the year he would accept his calendar pictures—since he couldn't very well help himself—and would do his part in the puppet drama, whenever he received a cue.

That night he sat in his library smoking until rather late. It was nearly midnight when his telephone-bell rang, and to his response a soft voice said: "I'm your Mary."

Allan Farrington almost fell off his chair, for, whatever visions he had conjured up of

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Mary's beauty and charm, this voice harmonized with the best of them.

It was entirely owing to his surprise at her announcement that he replied in no more sentimental manner than an explosive, "Good Lord!"

And then Mary laughed. And that laugh, following that voice, was the undoing of Allan Farrington. From that moment he lived only to hear his Mary, whether the fates might ever vouchsafe him a sight of her or not.

"I won't keep you a moment," Mary went on; "but I have your letter, and I want to say that you don't have to tell me what it is about me that holds your interest for the moment."

"Don't I?" repeated Farrington, stupidly.

"No; I'll tell you. It's my interest in you that makes you think of me now and then."

"By Jove, I believe you're right!"

"I know I'm right; men are all alike."

"I'm different," suggested Farrington, hopefully.

"Yes, you are; you're the only man I know who hasn't sent me flowers or paid me compliments or danced with me."

"I'll do all three if you'll let me."

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"Yes, and spoil your only claim to my fleeting interest in you!"

"Oh, not my *only* claim."

"We won't discuss things like that. Now I must go. Good-by."

"Oh, wait a minute, don't go!"

"Are you enjoying this conversation?"

"I'm just lapping it up!"

"You are interesting; but I must go."

"Oh, wait a minute, Mary; is your name really Mary?"

"It is; but I'm always called Polly."

"I call you Neræa."

"Who was Neræa?"

"Oh, she was an attractive young woman, mostly remembered by her tangled hair."

"Something like Struwpeter?"

"Yes, something; not much, though. What was the subject of your commencement essay?"

"The Marble Waiteth.' Why?"

"I thought it was something like that. Could you recite it to me?"

"I could, but I won't. Why are you so silly?"

"Because I want to hear your voice right straight along without interruption; and I couldn't think of any other way to make you talk uninterruptedly."

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"That's rather pretty of you. But this fleeting moment has passed, and I'm going now. I only called you up to say good-by. Allan, good-by."

Farrington heard the click as the receiver at the other end was hung up, and he said nothing, knowing there would be no response. Then, hanging up his own receiver, he went back to his smoke.

"I suppose," he soliloquized—for you must know that Allan Farrington was an accomplished philosopher—"that most of the men who start out by being woman-haters end by falling in love with one of 'em. I'm not quite ready to admit that I'm in love with my Mary—by the way, I forgot to ask her last name—but I sure am in love with her voice. If we could live at separate ends of the telephone, I wouldn't mind marrying her. I'd love to be able to hear that voice any time I wanted to. It sounds exactly like her scarf. Wish I'd asked her for a new one. Six months of pawing has marred this scarf's pristine freshness."

As the scarf was usually trailed over the back or arm of Farrington's chair, he was able to paw it whenever he felt inclined, which was often. But it had taken on an added per-

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sonality since he had heard that voice; and that laugh—which was, of course, part of the voice.

Still philosophical, he faced the situation. He admitted frankly to himself that he had fallen in love with a voice, and with the picture, or pictures, of the girl it belonged to. But he was not ready to admit that he had fallen in love with the girl. A disembodied voice was all very well; a pasteboard loveliness was all very well; but a flesh-and-blood human being was altogether a different proposition. He wanted the rest of his twelve pictures; he wanted to hear that voice again over the telephone; but he did not, he certainly did *not* want to meet that absurd Mary in the flesh.

These frank statements to himself were absolutely honest, and he fell to thinking how he could capture that voice and keep it for his own. Vague ideas of a phonograph record, to be made over a telephone, tangled themselves in his somewhat inventive brain. And then he forgot all else in remembering the marvelous sweetness, the indescribable harmony of that voice. He remembered, too, poignantly, the tone in which she had said that last good-by. Its haunting sweetness and sadness would stay

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with him forever. And it was ominous. She couldn't have spoken that way unless she had meant it for a real farewell, at the horrible thought that it *was* a farewell. Farrington sprang from his seat, impulsively starting to go down-stairs and interview the hotel telephone-operator. But he paused at his own door. He couldn't profane that first message of hers—and he feared it was the last—by trying to trace it through the maze of a hard-hearted Central's records. Indeed, he was not sure they kept records. He only knew in a general way that tracing a sender of a telephone message was a complicated and difficult process. Moreover, Mary had doubtless taken precautions against such tracing. She had probably telephoned from some friend's house or some busy public station—though, to be sure, she would not be likely to be at a public station so late at night, unless, perhaps, returning from some entertainment, duly chaperoned. He hoped she would be duly chaperoned; but with a Bold-faced Jig like Mary, one never could tell.

But that voice—and that haunting, lingering, leave-taking note in it when she said good-by! No, he never would hear that voice again—or, it might be, that only in Heaven he

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would hear; and with a confused medley of "The Lost Chord" and Tosti's "Good-by" hobnobbing in his brain, Farrington went to sleep.

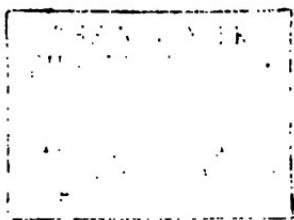
He awoke again; but July, from the tenth to the thirtieth, was as a dull, blank silence. He sat hours waiting for the telephone to ring, which it often did, but nobody ever declared through its green cord that she was his Mary.

He tried to amuse himself guessing what the next picture would be. "Of course," he gibed, looking at any or all of his seven goddesses, "it will be something blatantly theoretic and overdone."

He knew perfectly well that this attitude on his part was unjust and uncalled for; but, you see, he didn't think he cared. "You'll probably," he went on—he often talked to the photograph—"be walking along the board-walk, at some silly sea-shore place, with a parasol and a young man. The young man will be put in to make me jealous; but I shall only feel toward him a devout gratitude that I am not in his place. You little white whisk of femininity—" He was looking at the July picture now. "You are as pretty as they make them, but truly I can't see your face for your eyes.



"YOU LITTLE WHITE WHISK OF FEMININITY,"
WENT ON ALLAN, AS HE TALKED TO THE
PHOTOGRAPH



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If you ask me, I'd like a picture of you when you're asleep, then I might get some notion of what your other features are like; as it is, your eyes hide your whole face."

The big eyes looked back at him, and smiled quite as much as did the curved lips.

"Of course we've met before in some previous transmigration, or whatever they call the fool thing. Then you were Neræa, and I was Israfeel. Israfeel—whose heartstrings were a lute—and all the winged seraphs of Heaven coveted her and me! Well, perhaps I have got my Poe's poems mixed up—and I don't care if I have. You sit there and smile as if we hadn't known and loved each other in bygone ages. Well, keep on smiling. If you don't remember two hundred years ago, I can't help it!"

From all of which it may be seen that Allan Farrington, scientist and Egyptologist, was deserting his by-path of woman-hatred and making for the main-traveled road as fast as his heart could carry him.

CHAPTER VII



HE first of August brought its photograph.

The first glimpse of it made Farrington's heart stand still. It was not a frivolous sea-shore scene, nor was it theatrically posed.

It was—and Farrington had not mistaken the earnestness of her good-by—a picture of a big liner leaving her New York dock, and among her passengers and waving a small United States flag, though burdened with both arms full of flowers, stood his Mary! Waving to *him*, of course; there was no mistaking the expression on her wistful face, and, if there were such a mistake to be made, Farrington had no intention of making it. The picture was full of detail. The steamer was the *Mauretania*, and Mary and her group of friends were as plainly distinguishable as the letters of the ship's name.

In long coat and hat of correct effect, Mary's

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face was framed with the myriad folds of a wind-tossed veil. She was saying good-by to Farrington as plainly as she had said it over the telephone; and, with a feeling of utter desolation, he turned the picture face down and got up and stalked the room.

Later he hunted up shipping news, and discovered that the *Mauretania* sailed on the tenth of July—the very day after she had telephoned good-by to him. He sent for a passenger list, found several Marys and several ladies whose surnames only were given. But names meant nothing, anyway. He had heard Mary's voice—and now Mary was gone! There was nothing more to be said or done or thought. There was nothing more in the world, anyhow.

He spent hours studying the picture through a large reading-glass. His study taught him little, save a renewed conviction that his Mary's was the sweetest face in the world, and that it matched her voice exactly.

He noted, almost without interest, that the eighth was a marked date on the calendar—but what of that? She couldn't telephone him from England or from Switzerland, or from wherever she had gone, and he didn't care for the picture post-card she would probably send him.

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Still, when the eighth of August brought him a cablegram, he made no unnecessary delay in opening it.

It was sent from a small sea-shore place on the English coast, and its message said only: "Serene, I fold my hands and wait."

There was no signature. The quiet of the quotation soothed Farrington's unrest for a time. He concluded that if she could wait serenely, so could he. There were yet three weeks of August to be serene in, so he packed all of his Maryana into a drawer and went off to a friend's camp in the mountains.

He tried his best to be serene and fold his hands; and he hit it off fairly well, ingeniously concealing from his fellow-campers his real state of unserenity and the itching of his folded hands. However, as none had ever heard of his Mary, there was little suspicion directed toward him.

Well, before the first of September he was at home again; but the picture that ushered in the autumn was disappointing. It was distinctly and doubtless intentionally impersonal. Mary was at a garden party, one of those English affairs with a marquee and a band of music and a troupe of pierrots. Horrid bores he

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always thought them—and there was that rascally Mary evidently enjoying it! And without a thought of him—he could tell that by the saucy toss of her head as she looked up into the ugly face of some British beggar in a uniform. But it was his Mary, after all; and this picture of her was better than nothing. And anyway, she had that beastly Dragoon or Hussar, or whatever he was, put in just to tease and bother her devoted Israfeel! Her little coquettices were fast becoming adorable instead of melodramatic in the eyes of the grave Egyptologist.

But he sighed like a furnace, for he had had a faint glimmering of a shadow of a hope that Mary had made a flying trip and was on her way home. But it was quite evident that she was not touristing or tripping at all; she was only too surely spending the summer with friends, and would probably go back to town with them, or make country-house visits through the autumn and winter. And she had said the calendar would last but a year. Only a year! one little measly year! It was hard to understand how a nice girl could be so stingy of herself.

But owing to necessity's stern law, Allan

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Farrington was obliged to take what he could get of his Mary's favors, as he had no earthly way of begging for more. The Harlands were home again; but he didn't ask Gladys about the picture, for he feared disobedience to the command of the Princess might cut off what little remained of his calendar months; and, anyhow, Mary was so far away that it made little difference to him what her last name might be.

The September picture's calendar page had the twentieth marked. Hm! so he would get another cablegram on the twentieth; or, perhaps, some silly souvenir of her travels or the place she was visiting. Probably a foolish trinket of polished wood with a view stamped on it, or possibly a pressed ivy leaf from the grave of Sir Walter Scott. These thoughts came to him only when he grew unsevere and his hands became unfolded. Lots of other times he talked to his pictures—now nine of them—in a way no orthodox woman-hater ought to express himself.

About the second week in September he had a tremendous idea. He would have a frame made that would hold all of the pictures. The whole twelve, for there were three yet to come.

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Long and deeply he pondered over the details of his project. It was to be a frame such as never was on sea or land. He made innumerable designs; he considered all possible materials, from gem-studded gold down through the lesser metals. But obviously, a long frame, sectionally divided to hold a dozen ten-inch pictures, would be a most conspicuous object to exhibit in any room of his apartment, for all were more or less invaded by jolly and jollying friends.

So, of course, the only thing was a folding leather frame that should bend back and forth after the manner of an accordion. This could be set up at full length for his private and personal delectation, or could be folded away and concealed from public view when necessary.

When finished, the frame was a gem. The leather panels were tooled and illuminated by a maker of bookbindings who signed his work. The name of Neraea appeared here and there in tangled arabesques, and on the last leaf a proud Israfel was triumphantly blazoned.

Allan Farrington was greatly amused at himself while occupied with this piece of work, though even yet he didn't know exactly why he did it.

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But he was destined soon to learn. Toward the twentieth of September his serenity gave out entirely, and his hands positively refused to stay folded; although, of course, he had to wait—and wait he did until very late at night, when the telephone rang.

Now so often had he been fooled with that telephone that he had ceased to hope it might be Mary. And, moreover, he supposed her still having tea in English gardens.

And so, when over the telephone came that unmistakable voice, saying: "I'm home! Are you glad?" he uttered such incoherent exclamations that Mary simply laughed in his ear and hung up the receiver.

Then he was mad! But it was a mad so mixed with glad that they were indistinguishable. To be sure, he had made an idiot of himself; but who could help it, taken by surprise like that? To be sure, Mary had cut off the conversation as soon as it was started; but the joy of knowing that she was on this side of the ocean, under the very same flag as himself—this was about all the joy he could stand without losing his mind. So you see!

And he had heard her voice! And he had heard her laugh! And as he set up his frame

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at full length, with its nine pictures and its three vacant spaces, he had a sudden, blinding flash of intelligence. He knew he loved that girl, whoever she might be, whatever she might be! Not only her voice, her laugh, her pictures, but her, herself—his living, breathing Mary! He knew other people called her Polly; he knew that he called her Neræa; but she had called herself Mary—and he loved her.

Farrington then began to do all the traditional exercises. He walked on air; he gazed at his pictures with his whole soul in his eyes; and his heart beat for her, and for her alone. If he didn't write a sonnet to her eyebrow it was only because he was not thoroughly conversant with the structural technique of the sonnet form. But everything that a lover can do, without being aided or abetted by his enamorata, Farrington did. He had no more communication from her; he expected none; but from the twentieth of September to the first of October the realization of his love for his Mary kept him as pleased and interested as a child with a new toy. The real advantage of being a woman-hater is parallel to the spirit expressed by the small boy who was asked why he was pounding his thumb with a ham-

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mer. "I like to do it," he replied, "because it feels so good when I leave off." Hence the ecstasy of Allan Farrington's new state of mind.

Picture, then, the effect upon his ecstasy when he opened the envelop that arrived the first of October. The photograph represented, beyond question, a merry party at a week-endish country-house. The entertainment known as *Tableaux Vivants* was going on. The amateurish-looking stage and hastily grouped properties proved it to be an impromptu affair, but highly satisfactory to the polite audience.

The picture represented on the stage by living characters was that French picture entitled "Vertige." You remember, a good-looking chap leans over the back of a sofa, quite evidently with a determination to kiss the laughing lady he finds there.

Now, after all, a tableau means nothing, but Farrington was so new to love's fine distinction between things that mean nothing and things that mean everything that instead of treating it lightly, as a more experienced lover would do, he became boiling angry.

Only the fact that there was a place for it in the frame prevented his tearing the picture

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to bits. And yet, how could he put that picture in with the other presentments of his Mary? To be sure, there were men grouped about her in the May picture and in the September picture; but she really wasn't his Mary then. But now she had spoken to him over the telephone; she had said she was home again, and was he glad? Why, there couldn't be a more binding betrothal than that! And now the wicked little flirt was playing at tableaux, where another man looked as if he meant to kiss her! Of course he wouldn't kiss her; but his Mary had no right to be in such a tableau! Why, if she wanted to appear in "Vertige," she should have sent for him to take the other part.

And if the thought crossed his mind that perhaps she didn't look upon their love affair quite as seriously as he did, he refused to harbor it, and nursed his wrath instead.

CHAPTER VIII



O engaged was he in the fascinating occupation of nursing his wrath against the girl he loved, for the first time, Allan Farrington completely forgot that the calendar on the hated picture had a ring around the third of October. So all through the third day of October he was busy with his wrath and completely absorbed in its care and protection.

And so when the telephone rang late that night, he didn't think much about it, taking up the receiver mechanically. His telephone was always ringing, anyway, and it was rarely anybody interesting.

So when a sweet voice announced, in a tone plainly expectant of welcome, "I'm your Mary," it took Farrington a moment to disengage himself from the exactions of his petted and now somewhat spoiled wrath.

"Are you?" he said, and into the two words he managed to put all sorts of unpleasant in-

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sinuations, like irony and coldness and disdain and general unwelcomeness.

"Don't you want me to speak to you?" said Mary, her soft tones softer still by reason of her being a little frightened.

"Yes, of course I do." And this time Farrington's voice carried so much fierceness and strength and general masculinity that Mary was more frightened still.

"I only wanted to say that the seventh is my birthday, and I think it would be nice if you would send me a very small little present. If you will—I mean if you want to—I'll send a messenger-boy for it in the morning. Will you?"

Now such is the perversity of the human soul that, though Allan Farrington's was translated to the seventh heaven by this request, while Mary was speaking he chanced to remember that October picture. Send a gift for her birthday, indeed! Her *birthday*, when that popinjay would be prancing about like a Greek slave bearing gifts, and perhaps getting a kiss for his reward just *because* of the day!

And so, when his Mary's sweet voice said, "Will you?" and Farrington's whole being cried *Yes* with a thousand tongues, his wrath, his

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nursed and petted wrath, rose up and screamed out a loud, fierce "No!"

From the receiver to his ear jumped a little, tiny, frightened "Oh!" And then a silence that seemed to Farrington like a silence of a black eternity.

For the first time in his life Allan Farrington thoroughly disapproved of himself. He had sometimes noticed slight defects in his character, or had realized that his speech or action might have been better on certain occasions. But these trifling flaws had been indulgently looked upon and quickly forgiven and forgotten. Now, Allan Farrington knew that he had committed the unpardonable sin, for which he could never forgive himself. How *could* he have spoken that way to that little girl? Of course, it was nothing but a flash of his horrid temper; but he had never known before that he possessed such a beastly temper. And she had asked him for a birthday present. A birthday present! And he had refused, when in truth he would be only too glad to give her the half of his kingdom and follow it up immediately with the other half! And the worst of it was there was nothing he could do to make amends. His deed was irrevocable. He had put an end

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forever to the whole affair; and, instead of jauntily assuring himself that he was glad of it, Farrington admitted the truth that he was foolishly and utterly miserable over it.

And as the days dragged by his misery became more foolish, and, it seemed to him, more utter. He had nothing left to hope for; and a youth of twenty-one could not have been more dolefully despondent than this erstwhile woman-hating Egyptologist.

On the seventh his mood had reached such depths of despair that he was experiencing that strange quiet that comes when one reaches the very limit of desolation.

And when a messenger-boy came and insisted on seeing Mr. Farrington personally, Allan ordered him sent up, without interest.

Equally uninterested, the messenger handed Allan a letter, saying: "If they ain't no answer I'm to hike right off; but if they is, I'm to wait fer it. Is they?"

"They is," replied Allan Farrington, who had clairvoyantly discerned the signature before he opened the letter.

"I thought possibly," the note ran, "that you might have changed your mind and decided that you did want to send me a birth-

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day remembrance. If so, remember it must be very small; and if not, tell the boy there is no answer."

It was signed Neræa, and was written on the note-paper of a fashionable woman's club of New York.

Farrington had a hair-trigger intellect, and a wonderful power of tackling and throwing a situation.

"Wait for the answer," he said to the boy; and the youth willingly deposited himself in the easiest chair he could find and munched his gum in quiet content.

Farrington's brain worked quickly; but, though it jumped from one thing to another, it seemed impossible to think of anything available at the moment that would be just right for a birthday gift to his Mary.

A book was banal, flowers or candies unprocurable—and commonplace besides. [Visions of silver trinkets danced through his head, followed by fans and parasols, and all the foolish paraphernalia that woman-haters always associate with women. But, of course, he couldn't get any of these things, and he wouldn't have done so if he could. They weren't *right*. But what would be right? He glanced about his

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rooms. Ah, a curio! of course, some really worth - while curio; but small—for she had said it must be small. And then his heart stood still, for into it came the thought of his best scarab! His best scarab! It was a wonder, a marvel, the envy of all experts, collectors, and connoisseurs. To part with it would be like parting with his heart's blood. But, for his Mary! Why, of course, it was the only thing. He only wished he had time to have it set in a bracelet or tiara or stomacher, or whatever ridiculous things women wore nowadays. He drew the scarab lovingly from its case and looked at it. Was Mary worthy of it, after all? "A million surplus Marys," and all that; but there was no other such scarab in existence. Then came to him the sound of her little frightened "Oh!" when he had stormed at her over the telephone. Nothing less than his best scarab could square that. And if Mary didn't appreciate the thing—and of course she wouldn't—at any rate he had made the greatest amends in his power. And it was small. Dimensionally speaking, it was certainly small. But a greater gift was not in Allan Farrington's power to bestow. Restoring it to its case, he put in with it a tiny note,

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saying only: "For your birthday. Please telephone me to-night. I want you to."

After a moment's hesitation he signed it "Israfeel," and wrapped and tied the parcel.

"You are to take this answer to the lady," he said to the phlegmatic boy in waiting.

"Not to any lady in particular," returned the youth, holding out his hand for the parcel.

"What do you mean by that? What are you to do with it?"

"Jes' take it up to that there Dolly Madison Club, and give it to the desk lady there."

"Who gave you the note that you gave me?"

"That same desk lady. She has yeller hair, an'—"

"Never mind that. Are you to take the answer to her?"

"Yessir. An' I'm to report whether they ain't any answer or not."

"Hm! very nicely planned. Well, skip along, boy, and because it's the seventh of October, please accept this."

The denomination of the bill tendered to him caused the stolid youth to overcome his stolidity; and to an explosive "Gee!" he added a perfunctory "Thank yeh, sir," and departed.

"Rather clever of you, Neræa," Farrington

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observed, smiling at his picture-gallery, "and very sweet of you, Mary—dear," he added, as his eyes dwelt on the June picture, which was his favorite.

Then he deliberately and systematically killed time until evening, and then sat down to wait for the telephone message.

But it didn't come; and at midnight he gave up waiting and went to bed, not with feelings of unkindness toward his Mary, but conscious of a strong desire to shake her.

"I know you're simply dying to telephone," he said, to one or two of the pictures, "and you refrain only because you think it will tantalize me. Also which it does!"

It was several days later that he received a letter of thanks for the birthday gift. "It is very dear of you," his Mary wrote, "to send me what I am certain is your most treasured possession. It *is* small; but when I said *small*, I meant also of trifling value. Of course, I cannot keep this, and I shall return it to you soon. But I want to keep it over Hallowe'en, as a sort of talisman or something like that. I always test my fate on Hallowe'en, and I like mystic things about me. But be-

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cause I return it, don't think for a moment that I don't appreciate its value and the value of your sending it to me. The year is nearly over. Are you a little bit sorry, or glad? I think I shall telephone you once more before the year is entirely gone, and please be kinder to me than you were when I last heard your voice."

"And so I'm to have another chance," Farrington remarked, to his photographs. "Well, truly, dear, I won't be such a brute again. But I wish you had told me when you'll telephone, for, though willing to dance attendance on your caprices, I can't sit here by the telephone all the time."

And though he didn't sit there all the time, yet Allan Farrington spent many more hours within sound of his telephone than he would have done had he not expected a message.

It came on All-hallows Eve. It had been many years since Farrington had noticed that fateful date; but something told him that this was the night Neraea would telephone.

So when the bell rang, though it was a few moments after midnight, he was sure it was she.

"I've been trying my fate," she announced,

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with a chuckle. "Oh, Allan, I've had the most fun! There were a lot of people here for the evening, and we had all kinds of tricks and things; and Jack-o'-lanterns and everything—just like kiddies. And I tried my fate with apple-parings. Don't you know, you whirl them around your head and throw them on the floor, and they make letters. And what letters do you suppose mine made?"

"A. F.," returned Farrington, mindful of his manners.

"Nonsense! of course they didn't. They made E. S."

"Indeed; and who does E. S. stand for?"

"I don't know, I'm sure; but I suppose he'll come some day. But then, you see, apple-parings always make the letters E. S., because they can't make any others."

"Look here, Neræa, you're doing all the talking. Suppose you give me a chance."

"Go on, then, but you must say something interesting."

"I will. Now, it isn't too late for your Hallowe'en tricks, so I want you to go and look over your shoulder into a hand-mirror—I think that's the way they do it—but before you begin, just place that silver-framed photo-

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graph that's standing near you, so it will reflect in the mirror."

"Yours?"

"Mine."

A ringing laugh came over the telephone and then silence, and Farrington knew that he would hear no more that night.

"But I scored," he assured himself, exultantly, though what he had scored he wasn't quite sure.

From Hallowe'en it wasn't very long to wait until the first of November. And the picture came.

With an eagerness that he made no effort to control, Farrington tore open the envelop.

It was a lovely picture, and it made Farrington's heart jump at the sweet intimacy of it.

Neræa was in her own boudoir. She wore a lacy, frilly négligée garment, and was looking over her shoulder into a mirror on the bureau behind her. But on the table in front of her was Farrington's picture—the same one that had figured in the earlier photographs; and anew he wondered where she got it.

The pose was exquisite, unstudied, and full of grace. The roguish, laughing face belied the



IT WAS A LOVELY PICTURE, AND MADE FARRINGTON'S HEART JUMP



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sentimental occupation, and yet there was a tenderness in the smile that went straight to Allan's heart.

"You're a silly," he said, smiling back at the picture, "and you do love to have your picture taken for me to see and to admire! You're a witch, a Hallowe'en witch, and it won't be my fault if your fate, as you see it in that mirror, doesn't come true!"

All the details of the picture suggested Hallowe'en. There was a Jack-o'-lantern on the table grinning grotesquely. There were curled apple-parings on the floor, and a fateful-looking candle was burned nearly to its socket. And conspicuous among other things on the table was the open case containing Farrington's best scarab.

The sweet charm of the picture reconciled him to the dreadfulness of the one before it, and Farrington admitted frankly to himself that he was head over ears in love with this girl, and that his only aim in life now was to find her and win her for his own. He was not at all sure that he could do this. Allan Farrington was not over-confident of his power of fascination of the other sex, for he had had little experience and less inclination toward

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such things all his life. Moreover, this foolish little girl was only playing with him. He knew she was a beauty and a belle. He knew she must have a world of men at her feet; and what could an old fogy, dry-as-dust scientific man like himself offer her by way of amusement?

The marked date on the calendar was the fifteenth; and, with his Hallowe'en picture to cheer him, Allan bided the time more patiently than usual. On the fifteenth came a messenger-boy. Not the same one that had come before, but a sapient, well-behaved youth, who looked really responsible and reliable.

"Are you Mr. Farrington?" he asked, looking almost suspiciously at Allan.

"Yes, I am."

"Mr. Allan Farrington?"

"Yes. What have you for me?"

"I have this." And the boy produced a small parcel. "And I'm to give it into your hands, and go back and report. If you offer a written receipt, I'm to take it; but I'm not to insist on it."

Evidently he had learned this message by rote, and Allan smiled.

"Sit down, boy, and wait a bit; I'll send a note back by you."

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"No, sir; I have orders not to wait for a note. If you say you'll write one, I'm to go away without even a receipt."

"Oh, I see. The desire to write a note is sufficient identification that I'm the right one to receive this parcel." Meantime Allan had cut the string and found, as he had suspected, the case and scarab, but, as he had feared, no written message of any sort.

"Well, don't wait for a note, then; but wait a moment, and I'll give you a receipt for this. I'm sure the lady will like to have it. Is she at the Dolly Madison Club?"

"I've orders not to tell, sir; but I will take your receipt to her."

Truly there was nothing to be done with a messenger-boy of such astonishing impeccability. So Allan wrote out a formal receipt for the parcel the boy had brought him, and added merely a line after his signature, saying: "Please, *please* telephone me to-night."

Then he sent the boy away and began to live through the interminable hours till his liege lady should grant or refuse his request.

CHAPTER IX



HE did telephone. It was about ten o'clock when she called up Farrington, and her voice came soft and sweet, saying: "I called you because you asked me to."

"Is that the only reason?" Farrington spoke laughingly; but there was a trace of sadness in the girl's tone as she answered:

"Not quite the only reason. I like to talk to you; but this is the last time."

"Oh no, that's where you're mistaken."

"No; I'm not mistaken. I'm only a calendar, you know, and calendars last but a year. Are you glad you've had a calendar for a year?"

"I'm glad I've had it this year; but this is not the only year. I fully intend to have this same calendar through all the rest of the years that I live. Do you understand that, Mary?"

"It's so funny to be called Mary." And the voice had a gay sound which was transparently

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hiding a deeper emotion. Then, suddenly, with a change to a sincere note, she said, wistfully: "I know I have been forward and unmaidenly and—and shameless. But remember I'm only a picture and a voice."

"As yet, yes. But I vow you shall be more than that to me before long."

"No, I shall not. After the first of January I shall be to you only a memory. But I hope it will be pleasant memory. Don't think of me as bold and forward. I'm not really—truly I'm not. Why, Allan, I'm blushing! Though you cannot see me, remember I *am* blushing. A picture and a voice cannot blush; so remember, dear, that your Mary has the grace to feel ashamed of herself and to blush for what she has done."

"But I want to see you blush!"

"That may not be. The blush and the voice must be only memories—for the rest of your life. But I want them to be dear memories. Good-by, Allan."

"But wait, Mary, wait! I love you!"

"That, then, shall be my memory. Good-by, Allan—*dear*."

The little click that was so horribly final followed this, and Farrington knew only too

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well that he could not recall a telephone connection of which he knew neither name nor number. So he hung up his own receiver and sat down to think over his case. If the little witch were only fooling with him, he could not account for that sincere note which made her voice so thrill with sweetness and sadness as she said good-by.

But the more he thought about it the more he was determined to seek and find the girl who had conquered his hatred of womankind and had won his heart through a series of foolish impertinences.

At least he thought that was how she had won it; but it was really Polly Elliot's own sweet, lovable self made manifest through the claptrap foolishness that had stolen Allan's heart away.

From that night till the first of December he heard nothing from her. Of course, he did not really expect to, but he couldn't help hoping.

At last the first of December came, and with it the twelfth picture.

Each picture had been a surprise, and each had touched a different note on the highly strung lute that served Allan Farrington for a heart.

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But this last picture swept a minor chord and broke some of the more tensely drawn heartstrings.

It showed Mary in the now familiar boudoir sitting by the table, her head resting on her palm, and a wistful look on her sweet face that spoke truth, if ever a woman's countenance did. Farrington's photograph, in its silver frame, lay face downward on the table. The girl held in her hand the few notes she had had from him, and reached them reluctantly toward the flame of a candle. The picture was redeemed from pathos by the wonderful face, with its haunting sweetness and desperate sadness. Good-by was written in every line, and Farrington felt something choke in his throat as he gazed at it.

"No, no, my girl," he said, gently, "this is not the end." But a conviction clutched at his heart, for he knew that he hadn't the slightest real claim to his Mary, and that he was in all probability the passive object of a girlish escapade.

But after a long cogitation he summed up his thoughts by saying to the picture: "You're either an actress, or you're the sweetest girl I ever knew and you love me. And I *know* you're not an actress!"

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The next day he began to realize that he had received his last picture. To be sure, there was still the marked date, the tenth of December; but Farrington felt convinced that on that day he would receive only a final souvenir of some sort. His folding frame, with its twelve spaces, was filled. The game was played out. He had his twelve pictures, his scarf, the bit of ribbon, and a few letters; but the elusive girl was gone.

Slowly the determination came to him that he would find her, though it involved the unpleasantness of showing her picture to other people.

From the January picture he had the face only copied by a photographer; and, armed with this small photograph, he went again to Mrs. Henderson's.

But Gladys and her husband had gone South. They had been home through the fall; Farrington had seen them several times, but never could bring himself to show Gladys one of his pictures.

Failing here, he tried several other plans. He asked his men friends, though he hated to, if they knew the pictured face. But they all answered no, and Farrington realized, at last,

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that he could think of no way to discover the secret.

And then came the tenth of December. The mail brought him a flat parcel similar in size and shape to the photographs.

It was a water-color of Neræa, painted by a master hand, but idealized and impressionistic. The lovely face was perfect, while the hair drifted away in vague tangles, and the drapery melted off into clouds.

There was no word with it, and Farrington understood that it was a farewell gift.

The picture was a work of art; and, though evidently a perfect likeness, Farrington did not love it quite as much as the photographs, for it did not seem so much alive. But, of course, he adored it, and he took it to be framed. After much thought, he selected a frame of Florentine gilt, of elaborate and intricate design.

Quite as if casually, he asked the framer if he knew who painted the picture. The portrait was signed; but with such a hieroglyph that it was unintelligible.

"Sure I know the painter," responded the frame-maker. "Nobody in this country, and I don't know but in any other country, could

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have painted that exceptin' Carl Hertzog. He's a German artist, and he won't paint faces only just such ones as please him. But I don't wonder he did this girl. Who is she, may I ask?"

"I don't know," replied Farrington. "Perhaps it's just a fancy picture. It was given to me. This Hertzog—where does he live?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. He's a quaint old party—sort of a recluse. He has a wife, and they travel a lot, but they don't have much to do with people."

"But can't you give me an idea where I could find him? It's—it's rather important."

"I'm sorry, but I can't. I guess you could find him, though, through some of the artist people. Everybody ought to know Hertzog."

So Farrington went away and commenced a search for the eccentric water-color painter.

It was not such an easy matter as he hoped it would be. Everybody seemed to know of Hertzog, but nobody knew where he lived. He sold no pictures through dealers, and he consortied not with fellow-artists in their lairs.

But the chase was exciting, and the days flew by until Christmas was upon him. It

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broke Farrington's heart that he couldn't send his Mary a Christmas greeting, and he spent the entire day and evening in his rooms hoping against hope that she'd call him on the telephone; but she didn't.

The next morning, however, brought a tiny parcel in the mail. The little box was labeled on its cover: "P. S."

So it was a postscript! Farrington opened it, and found a little spray of mistletoe, but no other message. Gravely he hung the bit of mistletoe over the water-color portrait; gravely he kissed the pictured cheek, and then as gravely admitted to himself that there wasn't much satisfaction in that.

"But mistletoe or no mistletoe, calendar or no calendar, I shall some day kiss your own real cheek, Neræa, and those scarlet lips as well; and it shall be soon, too!"

This was sheer bravado, and Farrington knew it. He redoubled his efforts to find Hertzog, for he could think of no other way to attain his quest, except, perhaps, to employ a detective, or some horrid thing like that, which he would do only as a very last resort.

But at last the gods smiled on him, and he discovered the habitat of Carl Hertzog, artist.

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To him he went one morning, and now it was the very last day of the year.

He found that Hertzog admirably filled the description of a quaint old party, and his quaint old studio, in one of the small numbered streets of New York, showed beautiful sketches and water-colors, all of the same filmy, ethereal effects as the one he possessed.

Farrington had not brought his picture; but he showed Hertzog the little photographed face that he always carried with him, and asked the artist if he had ever painted that lady.

"Ach, ja; I haff done so. Ja."

"I thought so, Herr Hertzog; and now will you kindly tell me her name?"

"Nein. That I haff not the permission to do."

"You are forbidden to tell?" asked Farrington, quickly guessing the truth.

"Ja, dot iss it. She had forbidden me. She haff say that I must neffer, *neffer* tell her name, vot it iss, to anybody. Not to *anybody*."

Farrington tried every means he could think of to persuade the old man to break his promise. He coaxed, he bribed, he threatened; but all to no avail. The obstinate German had promised the lady he would not divulge her name, and nothing could induce him to do it.

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His wife, who was present, was more tender-hearted. She scented a love affair, and she joined her entreaties to Farrington's. But Hertzog was inexorable; and at last he picked up some brushes, sat down at an easel, and began to paint, in stubborn silence.

Realizing that he could do nothing more here, at least at present, Farrington took leave. His heart was heavy, for it was maddening to come so near his goal only to be confronted by this impenetrable wall.

Frau Hertzog accompanied him to the door. In the vestibule she paused, saying: "You love her? Yes?"

"Yes," said Farrington, fervently. "Oh, Madame, won't you help me?"

"Ach, I cannot refuse to help a lovers! Nein, I cannot refuse. Hush, listen! she is the Fräulein Elliot; Mees Polly Elliot."

"And she lives?" whispered Farrington, breathlessly.

"In East Greenfield, New Jersey. Hush! Run!" The door was closed abruptly behind Farrington, who surmised that the old artist had heard their whispers; and, blessing Frau Hertzog as he went, he walked rapidly away.

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"Ah, ha!" he chuckled to himself. "Pc Elliot! East Greenfield! Ah, ha!"

He went home feeling a good deal like Napoleon after Austerlitz, a little like Columb and very much like Sir William Gilbert Ferdinando, who loved Elvira.

So absurd was he that he crowed exultan over his twelve photographs, and kissed painted face under the mistletoe. Then sat down and cogitated. It was the last c of the year. His fingers fairly itched for telephone; but he had a brilliant idea that he could wait until late that night he cou cut up a little dramatic trick of his own th would be quite in line with Miss Polly Ellic tastes.

"I, too, can be dramatic!" he exclaim "I, too, can surprise, startle, tantalize, and phaps even frighten other people!"

The rest of the day he spent in planning a in revising, rejecting, and reconstructing plans.

CHAPTER X



HE afternoon waned, the early sunset came and went, and the evening hours dragged by. It was ten minutes before midnight that he took his telephone receiver from the hook.

In spite of himself, his heart thumped like some kinds of motor-cars; but he steadily called for the number of the Elliot house, which he had found in his suburban telephone-book. A servant answered, and Farrington gave clear and unmistakable instructions that Miss Polly Elliot should be called to the telephone, and that she should use the one in her own boudoir.

"Is this Miss Elliot?" he asked, after the voice he knew and loved had spoken.

"Yes; who is this?" came the answer. Her voice was sweet and cool; but he thought he detected a little frightened flutter in its vibrations.

"Who is this?" she repeated, for Allan had said nothing.

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"You know very well who it is! Dear, are you glad I'm here?"

"Oh, hush—"

"I won't hush; and don't you move from that telephone!"

"But I have guests; I must go to them. It's almost twelve o'clock."

"Hang your guests! I know it's almost twelve o'clock. Don't you dare to stir from that telephone! You're to see the New Year in with me, Neræa."

"Don't call me Neræa—"

"I will! I'll call you Tootie, if I like! This is *my* year—you've had yours. Hush, the clock is striking!"

Sure enough, Polly Elliot's own little time-piece had begun to chime its twelve silver notes. Farrington could hear it quite as well as she, and almost breathlessly they listened together to the strokes, though thirty miles apart.

"Listen, dear," said Allan, as the twelfth stroke died away; "your year is gone, and mine is here; but it shall be a Happy New Year for us both. As it's my year, I intend to make the most of it by beginning as early as I can. And, especially, I want to see its first sunrise

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with you. You will meet me just before dawn."

"I'll do nothing of the sort! Where?"

"At the Journey's End, of course! I don't care where. But you shall see the sun rise with me upon our glad New Year."

"Sounds like Tennyson! There's a glorious hill just back of our place—"

"That's the spot, then. I shall do the solitary - horseman act on foot until you come out there. But don't you dare be late!"

"What time does your old sun rise?"

"Seven-twenty-five. Have you an alarm-clock?"

"It's an escapade—Allan."

"Who set the pace for escapades? Now, good night, dear. Dismiss your guests, set your alarm-clock, and go to bed."

"But, Allan—"

"Good night, dear. Now, you jump!"

Farrington hung up his receiver and chuckled heartily to himself. "She's not the only one who can cut up theatrical jinks!" he exclaimed, with a feeling of school-boyish glee that he had paid her off in her own coin.

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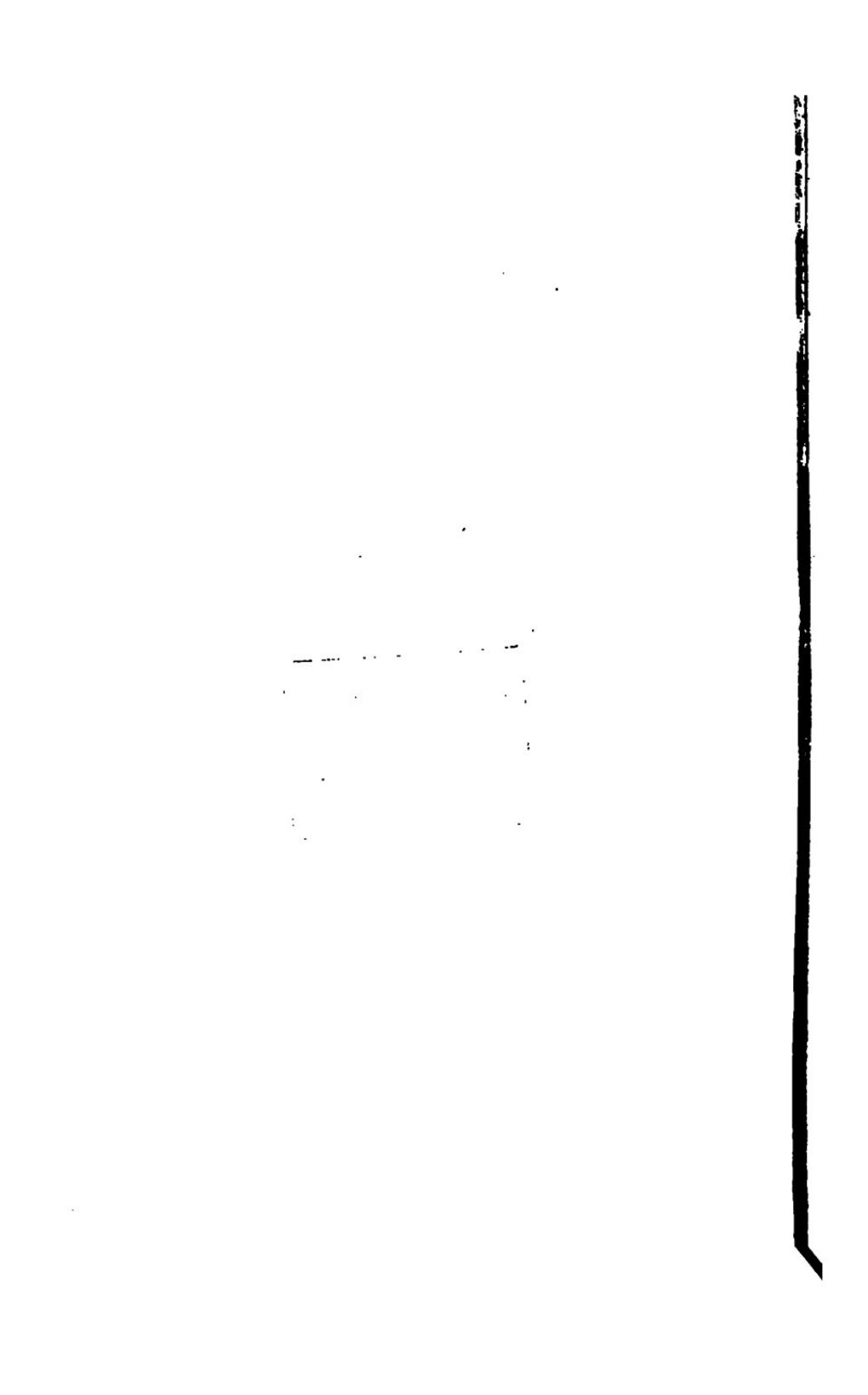
Wakened by his own alarm-clock, the infatuated Farrington rose at four. As he dressed he chattered blithely to his twelve photographs.

"You're to be subjected to a brave test, my Neræa," he said. "If you're not as good-looking as your pictures; if you're not as sweet as your voice; if you're not as whimsical and tantalizing as your twelve intrusions have led me to believe, then I'll none of you! Moreover, milady, if you come out to meet me in any fantastic garb, or if you arrange any theatrical setting or melodramatic finale, then also is the bubble burst! In fact, Neræa, I don't know just what I do want you to do; but you'll know. Maybe you'll think it's smart not to come out at all to your foolish old hill. Well, in that case, I'll throw pebbles at your window! No, it doesn't matter at all that I don't know which your window is; I'll throw pebbles at every one of 'em!"

It was but a few moments after seven when Allan Farrington stood on the railroad platform at East Greenfield. He easily learned the location of the Elliot house and proceeded thereto.



Straight to Farrington she came without self-consciousness



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Sure enough, there was the hill, rising from a little ravine back of the house. Not a high hill, but quite good enough for a Journey's End.

Half-way up it, under a clump of shivering pine-trees, Farrington turned and looked at Neræa's house. The balcony of her March picture was easily discerned, and he knew the windows on it were the windows of her rooms.

As he stood looking, from the house toward him she came. It was that chill, dark moment before the dawn, and to Farrington it seemed as if she were the sunrise. For she was smiling, and her eyes were dancing, and her cheeks were rosy with the excitement of the moment. She was enveloped from head to foot in a long fur coat, and on her tangled hair was a small, round fur cap.

Straight to Farrington she came without self-consciousness and without embarrassment. As she drew nearer he looked at her critically. Yes, truly, she was even prettier than her pictures! How could the black and white of a photograph give any idea of the brown depths of her eyes or the rose glow in her cheeks? How could even a perfectly tinted

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water-color tell of the sparkle in her eyes and the little quiver of those scarlet lips?

As she came nearer still, she looked a little frightened.

Then Farrington abandoned his pose of serene waiting. He unfolded his arms, and, taking a step forward, he folded them round his Mary.

The gray of the dawn softened to a pale blue, and that changed rapidly to pink—rosy, golden pink that spread and rippled and flamed into darting, glowing shafts of orange light. Then the whole horizon blazed into fire, and with a burst of gold the sun came up, and nearly dazzled them before they noticed it at all; and so they lost the whole of that wonderful dawn beauty which they had come out purposely to see.

"The sun is up, and it is day," said Polly, softly, quoting from the *First Reader*. "Say something, Allan," she went on, for Farrington just held her close in his arms and looked and looked at her. "Say something," she repeated; "it would be appropriate if you were to quote poetry."

"I will," he said. "You sent me a book of Bunner's for my birthday. I will quote a line from that."

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Then, taking her by her furred shoulders, he held her away from him, and looked at her hungrily, as he said:

“Love, we have lost a year!”

Then he kissed her.

THE END





